National government responsibilities for food policy-making in India

India is a quasi-federal government where individual States/Union Territories retain a degree of autonomy over food policy, and who makes food policy will differ between individual regions.
Who is making food policy in India

National food policy in India is developed and implemented across 19 Departments/Divisions and 15 Ministries of the central government. The key areas of food policy include agricultural production, trade, farmer livelihoods, food security, and nutrition.

The Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers’ Welfare is responsible for agricultural production and contributes to a Government-wide commitment to double farmer’s incomes by reducing production costs, and facilitating market access and trade. The National Food Security Mission encourages production of staple cereal grains and pulses. This is supported by the crop insurance scheme of Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, as well as water conservation (Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana) and sustainable agriculture programmes (e.g., Soil Health Cards). Non-cereal crop production is also promoted e.g., via the National Mission on Horticulture. Farmer livelihoods are supported by the Minimum Support Price for core crops and access to online trade platforms (National Agricultural Market: e-NAM). Three agricultural reform bills were introduced in 2020 to liberalise the sector. The Farmers’ Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill 2020 simplifies inter-/intra State trade; the Farmers’ Empowerment and Protection Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill 2020 supports contract farming; and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill 2020 deregulates the stockholding of essential foodstuffs.

Further areas of government linked to food production include the Department of Agricultural Research & Education, where the Indian Council of Agricultural Research co-ordinates domains of agricultural education and research, including those related to horticulture, fisheries and animal husbandry sciences. In addition, the Department of Fertilizers administers Nutrient Based Subsidy Programmes to support crop production, and the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying and the Department of Fisheries support livestock, dairy and fish production. The Division of Climate Change includes environmental policies for climate change, agriculture, water and biodiversity under the National Action Plan on Climate Change. The Division of Conservation and Survey considers the preservation of food and agricultural resources and includes the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee and the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan.

The Department of Rural Development protects farmer livelihoods and the food security of vulnerable rural households. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Program targets poverty and deprivation by guaranteeing employment; the Aajeevika - National Rural Livelihoods Mission promotes self-employment and income generating opportunities including the organisation of female Self-Help-Groups and access to financial services. The National Social Assistance Program protects the food security of older people via the Annapurna Scheme. The Division of Livelihood Support provides support for tribal communities producing and selling minor forest food products. The Division of Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Urban Livelihoods Mission provides food security for the urban homeless and livelihood support for urban street food vendors.

The National Food Security Act, 2013 is an umbrella legislation, bringing together new and existing programmes to protect the ‘right to food’. First, the Department of Food & Public Distribution operates a food subsidy programme via the Public Distribution System, which procures staples and then distributes them at subsidised prices through fair priced shops. The poorest households (identified via Antyodaya Anna Yojana) can access foods at further subsidised rates. Second, the Ministry of Women & Child Development provide women and child services to improve the nutritional outcomes for children, pregnant women and lactating mothers. Two key programmes are the Integrated Child Development Scheme and the Prime Minister’s Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nourishment (POSHAN Abhiyaan / National Nutrition Mission). Third, the Department of School Education and Literacy provides free meals to school goers via the Mid-day meal scheme. The Department of Consumer Affairs implements the Consumer Protection Act, 1986; the Bureau of Indian Standards Act, 2016; and the Standards of Weights and Measures - the Legal Metrology act 2009.

Domestic and foreign trade is facilitated by the Department of Commerce and the Department for the Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade which support foreign export, trade and direct foreign investment, as well as the ‘Make in India’ initiative. Trade is further supported by the Department of Revenue which introduced the national Goods and Services Tax in 2017 to create a unified common national market. The Pradhan Mantri Kisan SAMPADA Yojana, in the Ministry of Food Processing Industries, promotes modern infrastructure facilities (e.g., cold food stores) to support efficient food processing and distribution.

The Department of Health and Family Welfare includes the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India, which is responsible for food standards, compliance and inspections. This includes the Food Fortification Resource Centre, the Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2018, as well as, the Eat Right India consumer awareness campaign. The Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation supports WASH initiatives related to food hygiene, food safety, and reduction of parasite-related malnutrition. The Department of Health Research sets Recommended Dietary Allowances and Dietary Guidelines for Indians via the Indian Council of Medical Research-National Institute of Nutrition.